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DON'T HIT ME IN THE MOUTH, I GOTTA PLAY TONIGHT: MILES DAVIS AND BOXING

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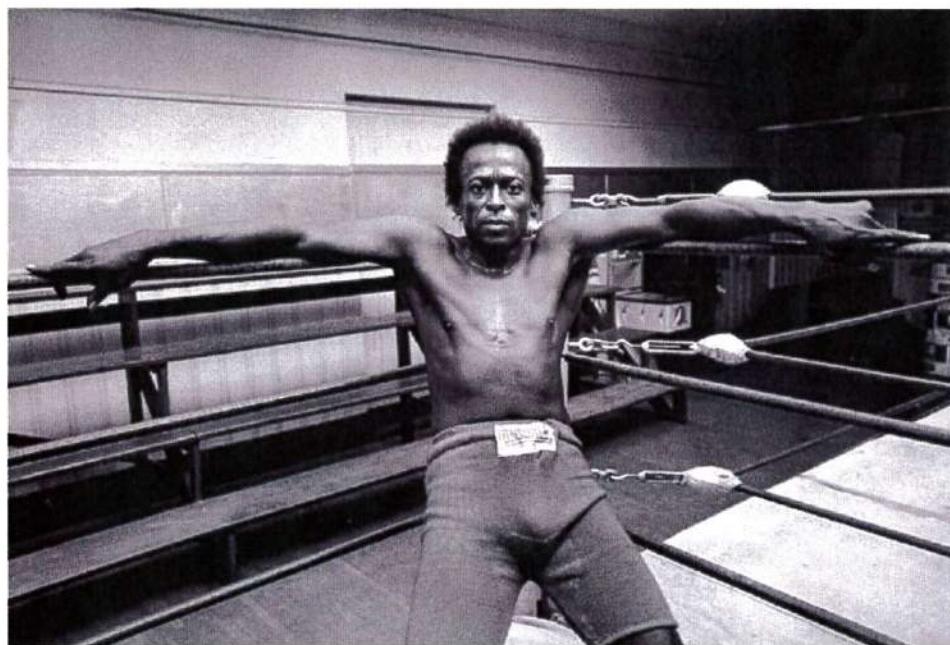
By Sarah Kurchak

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The legendary jazz trumpeter and composer isn't the only person to ever make the comparison—George Foreman famously stated that "Boxing is like jazz. The better it is, the less people appreciate it."—but few are as uniquely qualified to ponder the relationship between music and pugilism as Davis was. Over the course of his life and career, the man's connection to the sweet science was almost as complex and fascinating as his music was. It was a source of childhood inspiration, a muse, and even a lifesaver.

Miles Davis grew up loving boxing and came of age during a pivotal point in the sport. As culture critic Gerald Early writes in his essay "The Boxer As Black Male Hero" in ***Miles Davis: The Complete Illustrated History***, "He was eleven years old when Joe Louis became only the second black heavyweight champion and an American icon in 1937 when he defeated the Cinderella Man, James Braddock, in eight rounds. Davis was twenty-five years old in 1951, and a rising professional jazz musician, when an over-the-hill Louis fought his last fight, an eight-round knockout at the hands of Rocky Marciano. In other words, Davis lived his

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adolescence and entered his young adult years having experienced the arc of Louis' career as one of the most prominent, nay, eminent black men of his age, a hero for millions of black not only in the U.S. but also around the world."

Davis grew up aspiring to that type of heroism. "I like it when a black boy says 'Oohh! Man, there's Miles Davis.' Like they did with Joe Louis," the musician told Beat Down in 1974. "I would like for black people to look at me like Joe Louis."



Miles Davis at Gleason's Gym, New York City, in 1969. (Photo by Baron Wolman)

There was another prominent boxer who had a far bigger influence on Davis, though. He may have wanted to be loved like Joe Louis, but he wanted to be Sugar Ray Robinson. Davis once admitted that, in 1954, Robinson was the most important thing in his life next to music.

"I always loved boxing, but I really loved and respected Sugar Ray, because he was a great fighter with a lot of class and cleaner than a motherfucker," the musician wrote in his **1989 autobiography**. "He was handsome and a ladies' man; he had a lot going for him."

"In fact, Sugar Ray was one of the few idols that I ever had. Sugar Ray looked like a socialite when you would see him in the papers getting out of limousines with fine women on his arms, sharp as a tack."

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As a strung-out junkie who had already tried and failed to quit dope, Davis found inspiration in that level of dedication and commitment in the mid-fifties. And he decided to try to turn his life around again.

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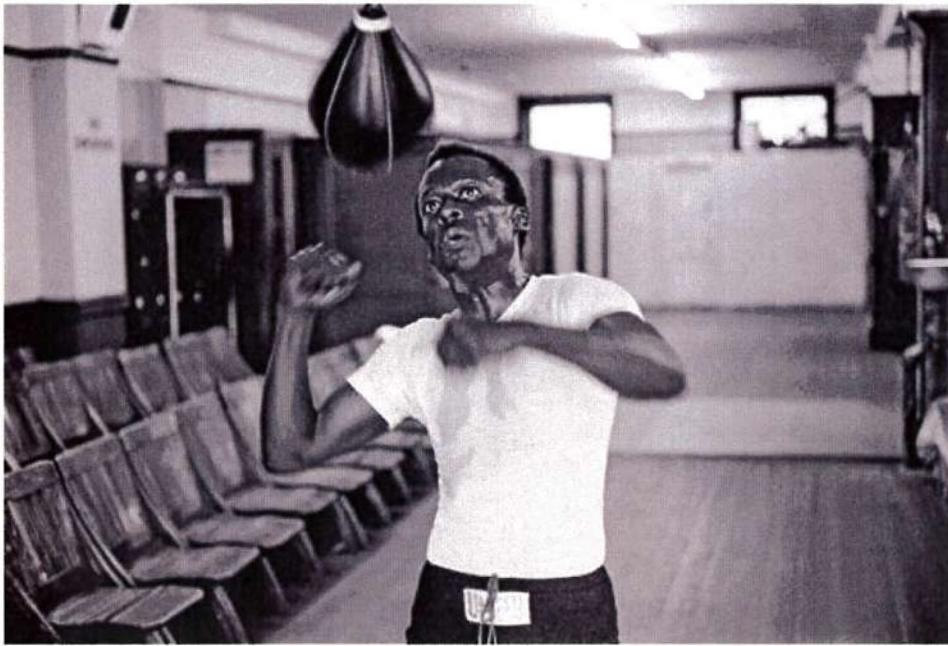


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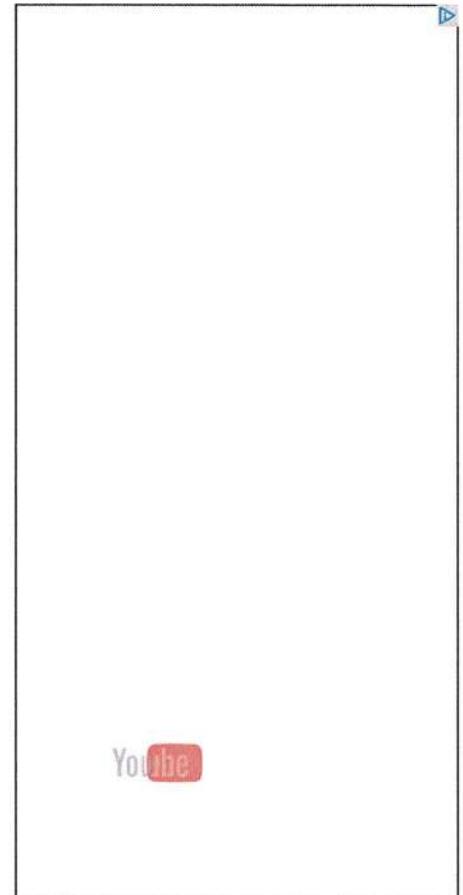


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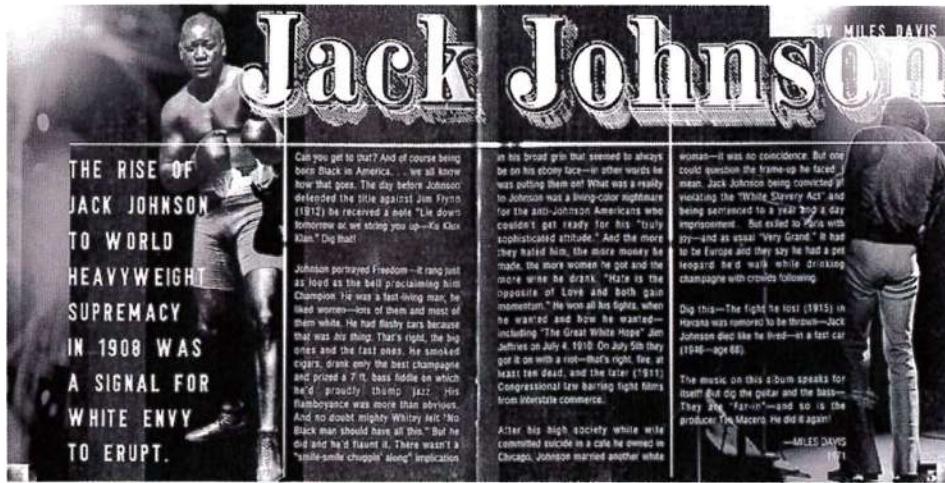
Jack Johnson Breaking Barriers Documentary



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The outtakes from the Tribute recording sessions are named after boxers, by the way, including one song named after Sugar Ray Robinson.

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Hermeto Pascoal, boxing with Miles Davis



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Written by: Sarah Kurchak

Jan 22 2015

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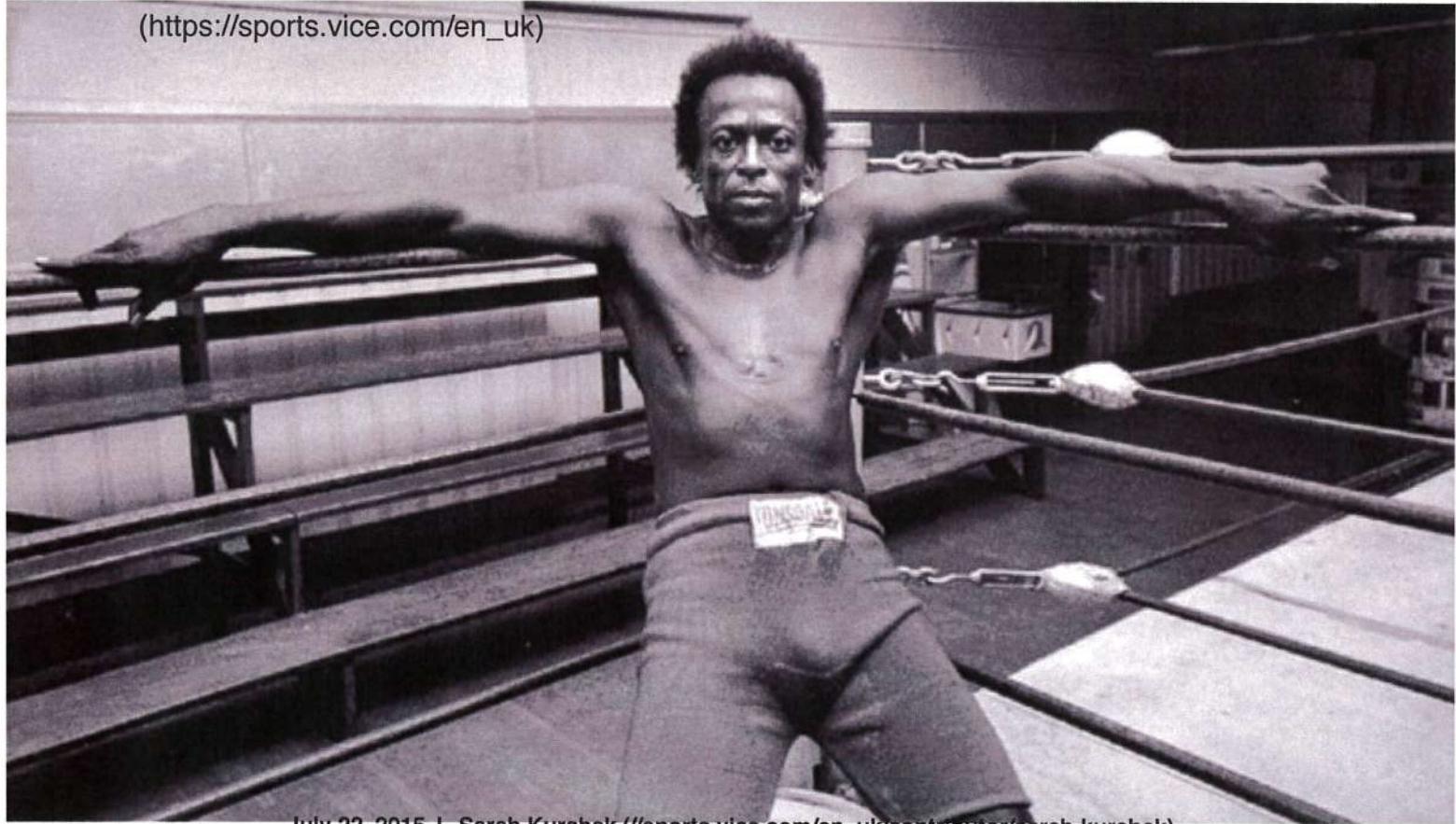


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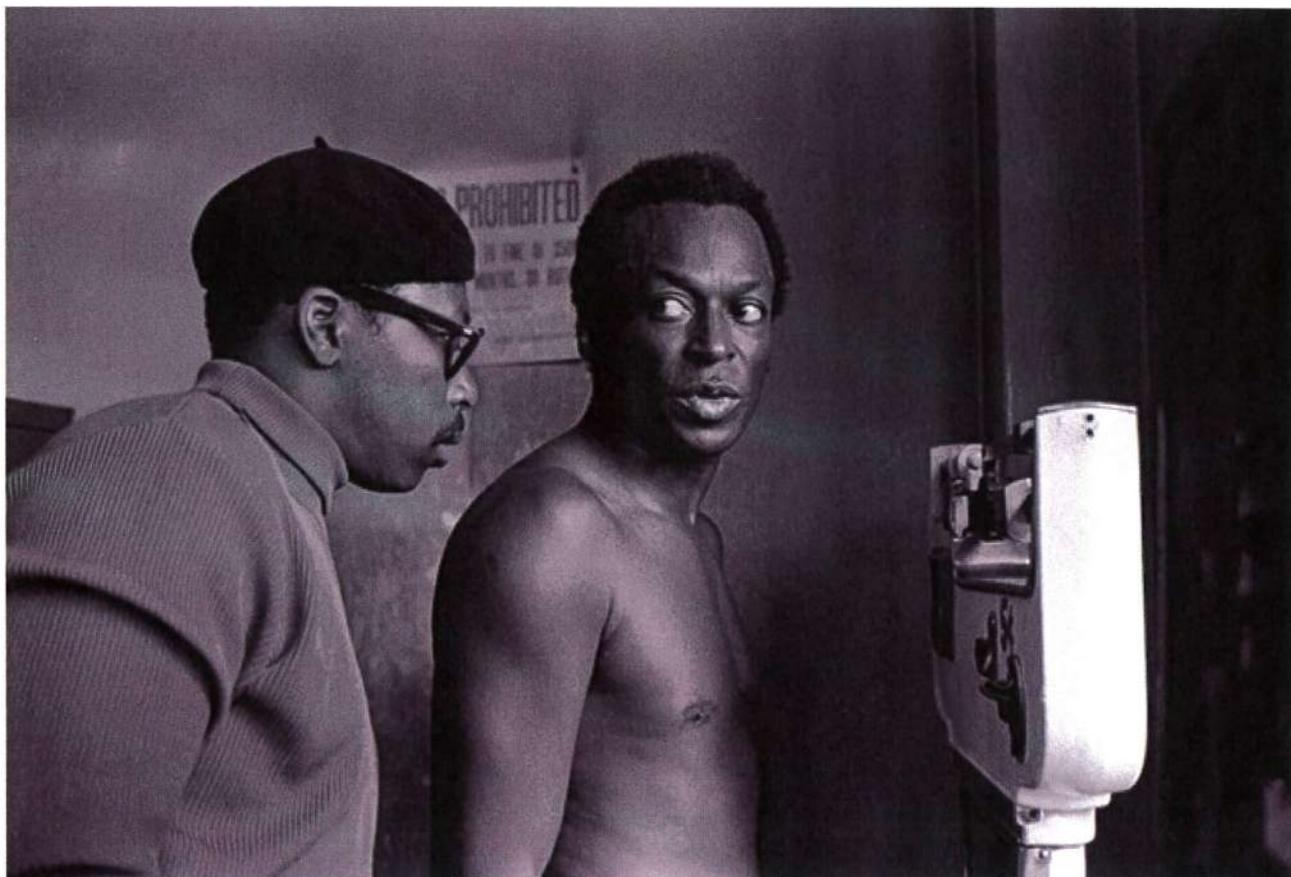
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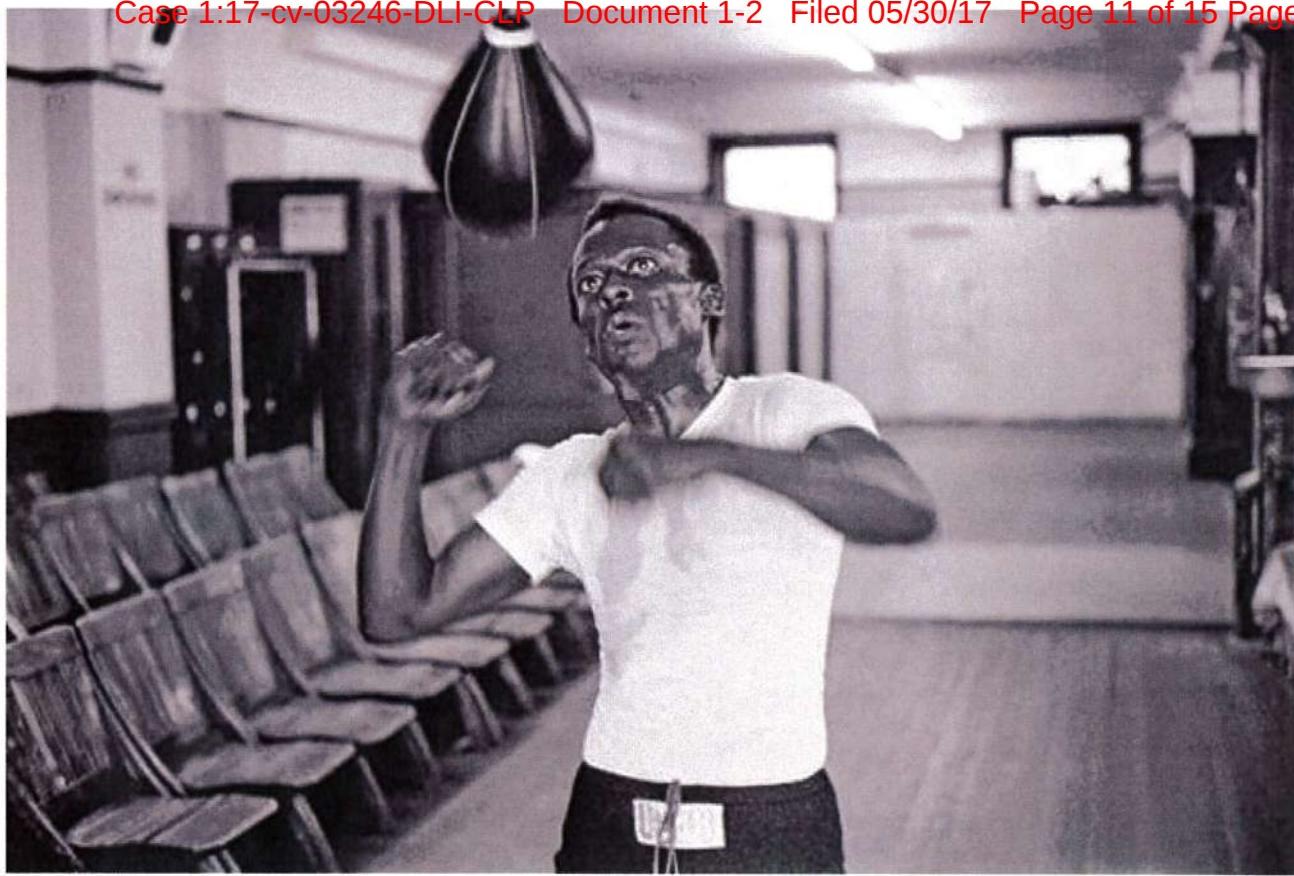
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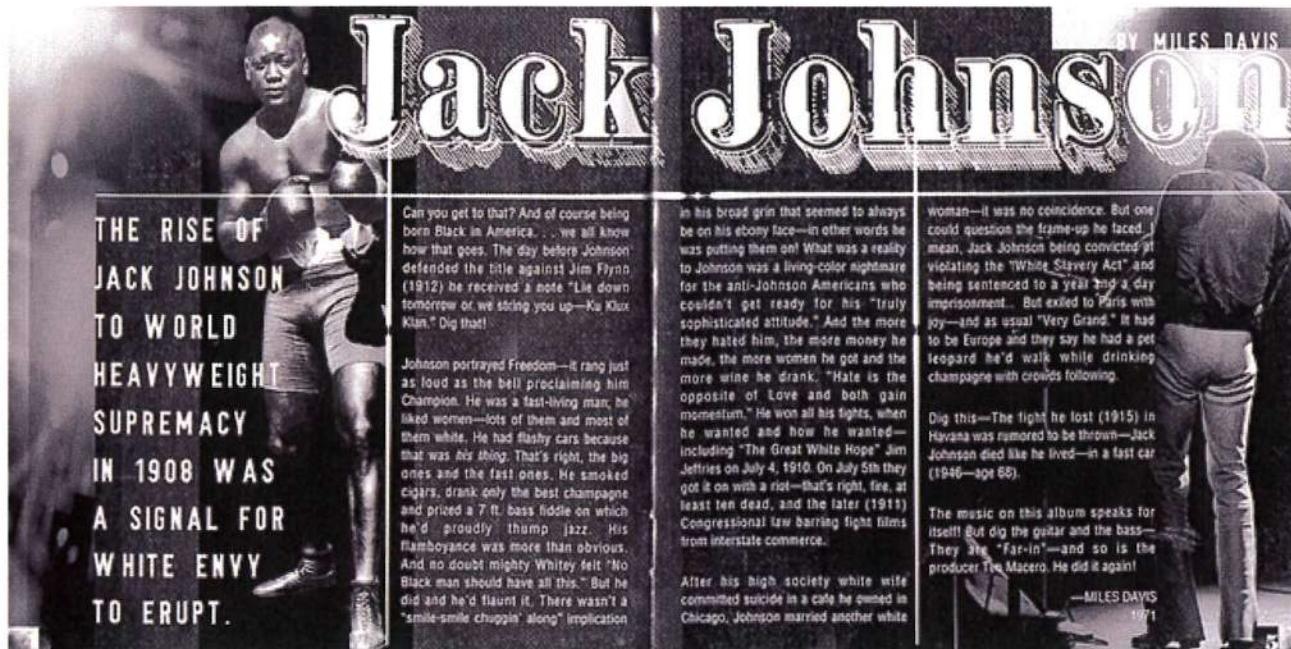
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